

Take time this week to reflect.....

How are the relationships between your practice and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander patients?

The quality of the relationships between

- Aboriginal families and individual practice staff;
 - Aboriginal families and the whole practice
- influence whether Aboriginal people access your health service.

A study of a mainstream general practice in Brisbane researched why Aboriginal people did not attend their practice. Most responses from Aboriginal people surveyed described difficult relationships between staff and Aboriginal patients. I.e:

- “Staff perceived as unfriendly and uncaring
- Staff talk down to you, “make you feel shamed”
- Staff body language, as interpreted by Indigenous people, suggested they were not wanted at the centre
- Treated poorly at reception, eg, “Why are you coming in at 4:30pm, we close at 5:00pm? Go home and come back tomorrow”
- Staff showed low tolerance to Indigenous child behaviour: “Keep them quiet” ...“

The health service addressed the issues raised resulting in significant improvements in access which continued to improve each year 1995—2008. [1]

Nationally relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are improving. Reconciliation Australia conducts a bi-annual survey that provides a detailed snapshot of the views of Australians about reconciliation and tracks how Aboriginal and other Australians feel about each other. The survey still shows that we still don't trust each other and there are high levels of prejudice between the two groups.

Reconciliation Australia Co-Chair Prof Mick Dodson said the research tells us that overall attitudes are positive and that we value the relationship. [2]

Hayman et al, *Improving Indigenous patient's access to mainstream health services—the Inala experience*. MJA Vol 90 No 102.

Media release Reconciliation Australia.

